Election Modernization Committee

Date: **November 19, 2019**
Time: **7:30-9:00pm**
Location: **Lyons Meeting Room, Town Hall 2nd Floor**

Minutes

Attendance: Adam Badik, Greg Dennis, Walter Horn, William Logan, James O'Conor, Maxwell Palmer, Juhan Sonin, Jennifer Susse, Lesley Waxman

1. News and updates

Jim and Greg updated the committee on the submission of the initial report to the Select Board on November 18th. They noted that the board was very supportive and relayed some of the board's noteworthy comments and questions. Selectman Dunn said he was unaware that we were missing appointments from the Select Board, Select Board administrator, and the Clerk's office, and he said that he would work to ensure those happen. Selectman DeCourcey asked whether we expect to have time to complete every item on the agenda. We answered "no" but added that we've been thinking about a warrant article to extend the life of the committee. Selectman Hurd asked which of the items we're studying would require state action.

Jim informed us of recent correspondence from the Clerk's office, who had heard about our presentation to the Select Board meeting. The Clerk's office was under the impression that Bill was their appointee to the committee. Bill is the appointee of the Board of Registrar's, not the Clerk's office, so we'll need to clarify that.

In related news, Paul Czech resigned from the disability commission and so can no longer be their appointee to our committee.

2. Review and vote to approve the Minutes from Last Meeting, October 22, 2019

We read through the minutes from the October 22nd meeting, and no one had any corrections.

Walter made a motion to approve the minutes. Max seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Review of Annual Survey Questions to be submitted to Envision Arlington

Max and Jennifer, the members of our subcommittee on the Envision Arlington survey questions, presented the current draft questions for our review.

We discussed possible revisions to the first question, which asked the respondent about their voting history. We decided to add an "I was not eligible to vote" option, which eliminated the need for the second question about voter eligibility. We also decided to qualify the question with "in Arlington," to be clear that we're not asking about their history in a place they used to live.

We discussed whether we would be able to attribute the survey data to the polling location of the voter. Max and Jennifer said they would double-check that the precinct of the survey respondent is collected by the survey.

Greg was concerned that the wording of the question about lowering the voting age would lead people to choose "not sure," because the possible age was left ambiguous. After discussion, we reworded the question to call out 16 and 17 as separate answers to the question.

We talked about possible revisions to the "Which of the following have you done in the last two years" question. We decided to separate the "Voted in a local (town) election" option into two separate options: one for town elections for local office and one for debt exclusion / override elections. We added an option for "attended a precinct meeting." We reworded the "run for Town Meeting" answer to "served on or run for Town Meeting," because the question asks about the "last two years," and Town Meeting Members are elected every three years.

Juhan commented that we are lacking in questions that are more "aspirational" in nature — questions that ask not only about what voters have seen but also what they want to see. Greg said that the committee did consider additional policy questions beyond the one about lowering the voting age, but it seemed unlikely we could get good data from policies they weren't yet familiar with. Lesley added that if we ask a question phrased in terms of a benefit like "would you like vote from home," respondents might just say yes to the benefit but that doesn't give us a good signal about their feelings about the specific policy.

Max read back the questions as they now stood. They are reprinted here:

Q1. Which of the following options best describes your participation in recent Arlington elections?

	Nov. 2016 Presidential Election (1)	Nov. 2018 State Election (2)	April 2019 Town Election (3)
I voted at my polling place. (1)	○	○	○
I voted early or absentee. (2)	○	○	○
I did not vote. (3)	○	○	○
I was not eligible to vote in Arlington. (4)	○	○	○

Q2. Have you had difficulty voting in Arlington due to any of the following (choose all that apply):
☐ Problems with the location of my polling place. (1)
☐ Difficulty parking at my polling place. (2)
☐ Difficulty walking to my polling place. (3)
☐ Lack of public transportation to my polling place. (4)
☐ Polling hours were too limited. (5)
☐ Polling place was not sufficiently accessible. (6)
☐ Issues with voting machines or problems filling out the ballot. (7)
☐ Early voting days or hours were too limited. (8)
☐ Other: (9) _____
☐ No difficulty voting in Arlington. (10)

Q3. If you voted in recent federal or statewide elections, what best describes your experience with early voting?
◯ I voted early, and I was satisfied with the hours and availability (1)
◯ I voted early, but I would prefer longer hours or additional days. (2)
◯ I did not vote early because the hours or voting days did not work for my schedule. (3)
◯ I did not vote early because I did not know about it. (4)
◯ I did not vote early because I prefer to vote on Election Day (5)
◯ I did not vote early because I voted by absentee or mail ballot. (6)

Q4. Do you support lowering the voting age for town elections?
◯ Yes, lower the voting age to 16. (1)
◯ Yes, lower the voting age to 17. (2)
◯ No, do not lower the voting age. (3)
◯ Not Sure/Don't Know (4)

Q5. Which of the following have you done in the last two years (choose all that apply)
☐ Voted in an Arlington election for a town-wide office. (1)
☐ Voted on an Arlington override, debt exclusion, or ballot question. (2)
☐ Attended a public meeting about a local issue. (3)
☐ Communicated with a Town Meeting member or other town official about a local issue. (4)
☐ Attended a precinct meeting. (5)
☐ Served on or run for Town Meeting. (6)
☐ Served on a town committee or board. (7)

Adam made a motion that the survey subcommittee submit these questions to Envision Arlington. Lesley seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

4. Further discussion on consolidation of Town Meeting Member seat voting

Greg and Walter, the members of the subcommittee on the consolidation of Town Meeting races, gave an update on their progress. They met with Town Counsel Heim on November 15th

to discuss the possible change. Counsel Heim outlined three possible ways to codify the change: (1) in a town bylaw; (2) by special act of the legislature that amends the Town Manager Act; or (3) by a standalone special act of the legislature. A bylaw would be the easiest and quickest route.

Greg raised an idea for discussion, even though he didn't think highly of it. If two elected candidates prefer each other's term lengths, should they be allowed to swap? For example, if a candidate wins a three year term but doesn't want to commit to Town Meeting for longer than one year, should our policy allow them to swap with a candidate that won a one-year term? Greg noted that, although we could theoretically allow it, it had the flavor of a kind of backroom deal that could undermine the will of the voters. Others agreed that it seemed undesirable.

5. New Business

Walter raised an additional concern that he heard at his local precinct meeting: that not all Town Meeting Members have email addresses listed on the town website.

We compare schedules to choose the next meeting date.

Jennifer made a motion to set the next meeting date for Tuesday, December 17th. Bill seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

6. Adjournment

Jennifer motioned to adjourn. Bill seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:03pm.